FOLLOWING DELHI FIRE SCARE, AIR INDIA'S FLEET BEING AUDITED FOR FLIGHT SAFETY

News / Airlines

Air India's entire fleet of aircraft, over 100 in all, is undergoing an emergency engineering audit. The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA), which began the **audit** on September 11, has told its officers to submit the audit report to it within 15 days.

The audit was ordered following **safety** concerns that surfaced after two cases of safety scares that involved AI aircraft. On September 7, an AI-operated Airbus 320, carrying 146 passengers from Varanasi to Delhi, sprang a hydraulic leak midair. On touchdown, sparks were spotted around the plane's nose gear. This prompted an emergency evacuation in which at least six passengers were injured as they misjudged their slides off the exit chutes.

A day later, the airline's engineering department reported that the tail of an aircraft carrying over 100 passengers from Jaipur to Mumbai had caught fire. "On arrival of AI 612 at Mumbai, the technicians observed tail fire and smoke during second engine shutdown," read the airline's engineering department's note to the DGCA. But the regulator said this was a minor and common incident, which occurred because of leftover fuel in the tailpipe.

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"The preliminary probe into the incident has thrown up doubts about the airline's maintenance records. Hence the audit is being conducted," said a senior DGCA official, requesting anonymity.

The audit would be conducted across all four AI bases, that is, Delhi, Mumbai, Hyderabad and Kolkata. The Air India spokesperson did not respond to requests for a comment. The airline issued a statement that said, "Air India planes are maintained as per regulatory requirements without any compromise on safety."

The audit will gauge how well the AI fleet is being maintained and whether spare parts are available, particularly in the case of the Airbus 320 aircraft, which are the oldest serving ones with AI. The aircraft involved in last week's mishap, the 26-year-old VT-EPB, is one of these.

HT has previously reported that the airline's Airbus fleet pilots' union had in March warned DGCA to ground the snag-prone fleet.

16 SEPTEMBER 2015

SOURCE: AVIATIONPROS
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